

GUIDELINES FOR THE CONTROL OF HAZARDS  
OF ANIMAL HEALTH AND PUBLIC HEALTH  
IMPORTANCE THROUGH ANTE- AND POST-  
MORTEM MEAT INSPECTION

**Introduction**

Foodborne disease and zoonoses are important public health problems and important causes of decreased economic productivity in developed and developing countries. Similarly, transmission of hazards of animal health importance via the food chain and associated by-products can result in significant economic loss in livestock. Inspection of animals at slaughter can provide a valuable contribution to surveillance for certain diseases of animal and public health importance. Control and/or reduction of hazards of animal and public health importance by ante- and post-mortem meat inspection are a core responsibility of *Veterinary Services*.

**Purpose**

These guidelines provide a basis for future development of OIE standards for animal production food safety.

**Hygienic practice throughout the food chain**

The Codex Alimentarius Code of Hygienic Practice for Meat<sup>1</sup> (CHPM) constitutes the primary international standard for meat hygiene and incorporates a risk-based approach to application of sanitary measures throughout the food chain. Ante-mortem inspection is described as a primary component of meat hygiene pre-slaughter, and post-mortem inspection is described as a primary component of process control in post-slaughter meat hygiene. The CHPM specifically recognises the dual objectives that slaughterhouse inspection activities deliver in terms of animal and public health.

The CHPM does not provide inspection measures for specific hazards or organoleptically detected abnormalities, which remain the responsibility of national competent authorities. The animal and public health risks associated with livestock populations vary across regions and animal husbandry systems, and ante- and post-mortem inspection needs to be tailored to the individual country situation and its animal and public health objectives.

The CHPM provides a platform for development of meat hygiene systems that are based on risk assessment. There are few risk assessment models or relevant scientific information available on public health hazards, making difficult the development of risk-based standards for food-borne zoonoses. While this scientific information is being accumulated, ante- and post-mortem inspection systems will remain dependent on traditional approaches.

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<sup>1</sup> Code of Hygienic Practice for Meat, CAC/RCP 58-2005

## **Veterinary Services and meat inspection programmes**

*Veterinary Services* are primarily responsible for the development of ante- and post-mortem meat inspection programmes. Wherever possible, inspection procedures should be risk-based and management systems should reflect international norms. In respect of ante- and post-mortem inspection as a component of meat hygiene, responsibilities of *Veterinary Services* include:

- Risk assessment
- Establishment of policies and standards
- Design and management of inspection programmes
- Assurance and certification of appropriate delivery of inspection and compliance activities
- Dissemination of information throughout the food chain

### **Risk assessment**

*Veterinary Services* should utilise risk assessment to the greatest extent possible in the development of sanitary measures. *Veterinary Services* should give priority to addressing microbiological contamination, rather than gross abnormalities detected at ante and post-mortem inspection, as this has been found to be the most important source of hazards.

Microbiological, serological or other testing at single-animal and herd level as part of ante- and post-mortem inspection should be used to support surveillance, as well as risk assessment of prioritised foodborne hazards. The information gathered should be linked to human disease data to allow an assessment of the effectiveness of various management options, as well as a general evaluation of food sources of foodborne disease.

Application of a generic framework should provide a systematic and consistent process for managing all biosecurity risks, while accommodating the different risk assessment methodologies used in animal and public health.

### **Establishment of policies and standards**

The national competent authority(s) should provide an appropriate institutional environment to allow *Veterinary Services* to develop the necessary policies and standards.

As well as meeting public health objectives, policies and standards relating to ante- and post-mortem inspection should aim to detect and remove hazards of animal health significance from the food chain. This may be achieved by the removal of live animals at ante-mortem inspection or by the removal of specific tissues at post-mortem inspection.

*Veterinary Services* should integrate their activities to the maximum extent possible and practicable so as to increase the efficacy of policies to prevent duplication of effort and unnecessary costs e.g. within the process of international certification.

### **Design and management of inspection programmes**

In meeting animal and public health objectives prescribed in national legislation or required by *importing countries*, *Veterinary Services* contribute through the direct performance of some veterinary tasks or through the auditing of animal and public health activities conducted by other agencies or

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the private sector. To this end, *Veterinary Services* provide assurances domestically and to trading partners that safety and suitability standards have been met.

*Veterinary Services* should allow flexibility in meat inspection service delivery through an officially recognised competent body operating under its supervision and control. In recognition of the contribution of industry to food safety, quality assurance systems may be extended in the case of ante- and post-mortem inspection to systems that integrate industry and *Veterinary Services* activities. Nevertheless, *Veterinary Services* should take into account the factors identified in Chapter 1.3.3 on the Evaluation of *Veterinary Services*. For example, if personnel from the private sector are used to carry out ante- and post-mortem inspection activities under the overall supervision and responsibility of the *Veterinary Services*, the *Veterinary Services* should specify the competency requirements for all such persons and verify their performance.

### **Assurance and certification**

Assurance and certification of appropriate delivery of inspection and compliance activities is a vital function of *Veterinary Services*. International health certificates providing official assurances for trading of meat must engender full confidence to the country of importation.

### **Dissemination of information**

Organisation and dissemination of information throughout the food chain involves multidisciplinary inputs. To ensure the effective implementation of ante- and post-mortem inspection procedures, *Veterinary Services* should have in place systems for the monitoring of these procedures and the exchange of information gained. Animal identification and traceability systems should be integrated in order to be able to trace slaughtered animals back to their place of origin, and products derived from them forward to processors.